

go back to the row, they'd just walk up into that hill
and they lived there like animals --
part of it was a parkground and some of them lived out
of the trashcans and others trekked down to the row for
feed and then returned
and
they all sold their blood for
wine ("the one who gets my transfusion is going to be
drunk for a long time!" was the old
joke.)

there must have been 18 or 20 of them up there and
they were more or less as happy as corporate lawyers
stockbrokers or airline
pilots.

civilization has sections just like an orange and when
you peel the skin away, pull it apart, chew at it, the
finalization is a mouthful of seed which you can either
swallow or spit
out.

most swallow it
like the guys at North Avenue
21.

PRACTICE

in that depression neighborhood I had two buddies
Eugene and Frank
and I had wild fist fights with each of
them
once or twice a week.
the fights lasted 3 or 4 hours and we came out
with
smashed noses, fattened lips, black eyes, sprained
wrists, bruised knuckles, purple
welts.

our parents said nothing, let us fight on and
on
watching disinterestedly and
finally going back to their newspapers
or their radios or their thwarted sex lives,
they only became angry if we tore or ruined our
clothing and for that, and only for that, we understood
them.

but Eugene and Frank and I
we had some good work-outs
we rumbled through the evenings, crashing through
hedges, fighting along the asphalt, over the

curbings and into strange front and backyards of
unknown homes, the dogs barking, the people screaming at
us.

we were

maniacal, we never quit until the call for supper
which none of us could afford to
miss.

anyhow, Eugene became a Commander in the
Navy and Frank became a Supreme Court Justice, State of
California, and I fiddled with the
poem.

HOW I GOT STARTED

it has taken me decades to realize
why I was usually chosen over the
6 or 7 candidates for those
paltry shipping clerk jobs
in those small business houses
across the nation.

first, I was big --

which meant I could lift heavy
objects.

second, I was ugly --

which meant I was no threat to
the secretaries.

third, I looked dumb --

which meant I was too stupid
to steal.

if I had been running a business
and a guy like me had come to apply
for a job opening
I would have hired him
right away.

which is rather
what I ended up doing anyhow
in another kind of
business.

-- Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA